

Director of FNIH promotes foundation

By Kelly Lenox

During an April 21 visit to NIEHS, Maria Freire, Ph.D., president and executive director of the Foundation for the National Institutes of Health (FNIH), brought a welcome message of support to the researchers and leadership of NIEHS about this often-overlooked source of support for NIH scientists.

NIEHS and NTP Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., welcomed Freire warmly. "We are going to have a treat learning more about the foundation, which Dr. Freire calls 'our foundation,'" Birnbaum said.

Freire explained that, although it is sometimes seen as a well-kept secret, [FNIH](http://www.fnih.org/) (<http://www.fnih.org/>)

can only achieve its goals if NIH researchers, including those beyond the Bethesda, Maryland campus, understand its role. "I hope to leave you with a sense of how the foundation can be helpful to you," she told the attentive audience.

Independent and Nimble

Freire first came to NIH in 1995, leaving in 2001 to become CEO of the Global Alliance for TB Drug Development, and later president of the Albert and Mary Lasker Foundation. "Through all of this time, I've never visited NIEHS," she said. Appointed to her new role at the FNIH in November 2012, Freire was visibly pleased to be correcting that. "Our mission is to support the mission of NIH," she said. "Without you, the foundation has no reason to be."

As a nonprofit organization, FNIH is completely independent of NIH, though the directors of NIH and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration serve as ex officio members of the board of directors.

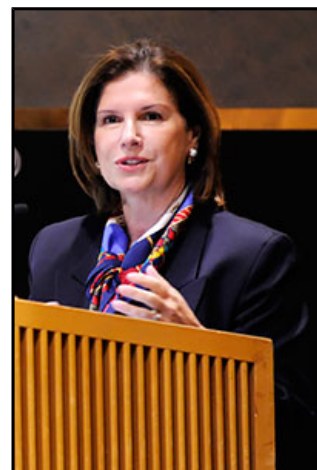
Freire described FNIH as a nimble organization, able to support a variety of goals and projects within NIH. Because it does not have an endowment, fundraising is the sole source for supporting projects, whether suggested by funders or proposed by researchers.

Adding NIEHS to the list

FNIH projects range from events and seminars to research projects, though research accounts for the vast majority of the funds allocated, according to Freire. Some projects originate with funders who approach FNIH with an interest in a particular research question or project. The foundation then searches out researchers interested in taking on the work.

Other projects originate with NIH researchers. The foundation then approaches funders likely to be interested in supporting it. NIH established an internal review process for such projects. Each institute or center (IC) conducts a scientific review of a project proposed by one of its scientists. Upon approval, the IC director sends the proposal to the NIH Office of the Director for review, which then forwards it to the Foundation. There is no application cycle, Freire explained. Funding requests are reviewed on a monthly basis by FNIH.

As she showed charts of how funds are allocated among projects and ICs, Freire noted that, at the moment, no NIEHS projects receive FNIH funding. "We need to change that," she said.



Freire urged researchers to understand the perspective of funders. "Whether it's \$10 or \$100,000, if I ask you for money, you'll want to know what I'm going to do with it," she said. "We have to justify every cent, so having realistic expectations and timelines is important." (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Mary Wolfe, Ph.D., left, director of the NTP Office of Liaison, Policy, and Review, and Kent Stone, chief of operations in the NIEHS Office of the Scientific Director, both represent programs that could benefit from FNIH support. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Among the attendees interested in correcting the current lack of FNIH funding for NIEHS and NTP research were, left to right, NIEHS Clinical Research Unit Medical Director Stavros Garantziotis, M.D.; Gwen Collman, Ph.D., director of the NIEHS Division of Extramural Research and Training; and Tammy Collins, Ph.D., head of the NIEHS Office of Fellows' Career Development. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



Birnbaum, right, led the question and answer session with Freire. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

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